

FORM A - AREA

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
294 Washington Street, Boston, MA. 02108

Form numbers in this area	Area letter
301-364	F



Lexington

if area (if any) Woburn Street

1 date or period nineteenth to

eth century

Sketch map. Draw a general map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets (including route numbers, if any) and indicate north. (Attach a separate sheet if space here is not sufficient)

See attached map

Recorded by Nancy S. Seasholes

Organization Lexington Historical Commission

Date April, 1984

(Staple additional sheets here)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of area. (Describe physical setting, general character, and architecturally significant structures).

The Woburn Street area is an architecturally cohesive neighborhood of nineteenth century working-class housing. Comprised of closely spaced dwellings of similar scale and building materials, houses range from one-and-a-third to two-and-a-half stories in height. The area is significant as one of the largest concentrations of workers houses to survive in the western suburbs of Boston. This is the only locus in Lexington where buildings of this scale survive in numbers.

Ever since it was laid out on this route in 1832, Woburn Street, today the heavily trafficked major street east from Lexington Center, has been the site of small workers cottages and vernacular houses. Cottage Street, an aptly-named quiet back street, and Vine Street, a narrow hilly street which brackets Woburn Street, form a part of the same visually cohesive neighborhood and experienced the same development pattern.

(see Continuation Sheet)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE of area. (Explain development of area, what caused it, and how it affected community; be specific).

A road from Lexington Center to Woburn has existed since the seventeenth century: there is a 1696 reference to Woburn Street as a "lane," and another indicating that Woburn Street superseded Vine Street in 1718 (Worthen 1946:22, 25). A different account, however, says that Woburn Street was where Vine Street now is until 1832 when the present Woburn Street was laid out (Lexington Minute Man, n.d.).

Soon after this date, Woburn Street became a locus of small cottages. Although more research is needed to establish what factors contributed to the development of the Woburn Street area as a working-class neighborhood, it is clear that by 1852 there were the four existing Greek Revival cottages on Woburn Street (at 44, 66, 76, and 147) and some small workers cottages on Vine Street (at 28, 116, and 121). The major development of the Woburn Street area seems to have occurred after about 1855, however. By 1875 the north side of the street from the intersection of Vine Street opposite the west end of Cottage Street was lined with small houses (at 61, 63, 64, 67, 79, 71, and 75) and from the present 85 Woburn Street to the east intersection with Vine Street (at 85, 91, 103, and 107). In addition, Cottage Street had been laid out and cottages built on its south side (at 8, 10, 14, 20, 22, and 26).

The Woburn Street area is important not only because of this concentration of working-class housing but also because of who lived in these houses. Beginning probably around 1855 but certainly by 1875, the vast majority of the residents in the Woburn Street area were Irish. Irish immigrants had begun moving to Lexington in the 1850s to work as laborers on farms and in other

(see Continuation Sheet)

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Middlesex County, Volume I. Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis and Company, 1890.

Lexington Minute Man, article on Woburn Street, n.d.

Reinhardt, Elizabeth. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University.

Worthen, Edwin B. A Calendar History of Lexington, Massachusetts 1620-1946, pp. 22, 25, 66. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Savings Bank, 1946.

(see Continuation Sheet)

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Lexington	Form No: F
Property Name: Woburn Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Woburn Street area, perhaps because it was a modest neighborhood, was the section to which many older houses, at least one of them pre-Revolutionary, were moved to make way for new buildings or street widenings in other parts of town. Thus the Woburn Street area is architecturally significant not only because of the workers houses, but also because of the houses moved there from elsewhere. Most of the workers cottages and vernacular houses are discussed in this area form grouped by building type; particularly important vernacular buildings and houses that have been moved to Woburn Street are discussed on separate building forms.

Greek Revival. Greek Revival houses are at 44, 66, 76, and 147 Woburn Street. They are all small cottages and are characterized by granite or brick foundations and some Greek Revival elements. The house at 44 Woburn Street has a brick foundation and is set with its gable end perpendicular to the street. It was originally three bays wide and one deep with a full entablature on the side and a center side entrance with full sidelights. The other Greek Revival cottages are the more typical gable-end-to-the-street, three-bay-wide, two rooms deep and side hall plan. Sixty-six Woburn Street, on a granite foundation, has lost most of its exterior finishes but still retains the transom and sidelights around the doorway; the two-story ell at the rear has fluted pilasters at the corners of the porch. Seventy-six Woburn Street is covered in a separate building form. The house at 147 Woburn Street is on a brick foundation and retains some exterior finishes: corner boards, frieze boards in the gable end, long front windows, and sidelights next to the door. The unusual triangular dormers are undoubtedly later additions.

Workers Cottages before 1876. These cottages are on brick foundations, suggesting a construction date in the mid-nineteenth century, and are all one-and-a-third stories high. Cottages of this type are located at 48, 61, 69, 71, and 91 Woburn Street, 8, 10, and 26 Cottage Street, and 116 and 121 Vine Street. All these cottages are three bays wide and one room deep and almost all are set with the side facing the street and a center entrance (only 29 Cottages Street has a gable end entrance). Most of these cottages have their original narrow brick chimneys and some retain other exterior finishes as well: for example, 48 and 71 Woburn Street, 8 and 10 Cottage Street, and 116 and 121 Vine Street still have clapboard siding and corner boards. Almost all the cottages have additions of some sort; the one at 91 Woburn Street has a cottage-size ell on a fieldstone foundation set perpendicular to the original house.

Other Houses before 1876. A variation of the workers cottage is the double house at 38-40 Woburn Street. Like the cottages, each section is three bays long and one room deep with a center entrance on the side and a narrow center chimney, but this house is one-and-a-half stories high in contrast to the one-and-a-third story cottage. Also, this house is on a granite and fieldstone foundation, suggesting a construction date in the first half of the nineteenth century; it is not, however, indicated on the 1852 map. A house with similar very narrow profile, although two stories high, is located at 65 Woburn Street.

(see Continuation Sheet)

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Lexington	Form No: F
Property Name: Woburn Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (continuation sheet 2)

Another variation of the workers cottage is illustrated by the houses at 67 Woburn Street, 20 Cottage Street, 22 Cottage Street, and 28 Vine Street. These are all on brick foundations, and, like the house at 67 Woburn Street, are three bays long, one rooms wide, and two stories high, though with a wider profile. They also are set with the side to the street and the entrance in the center. The house at 20 Cottage Street is a double one and that at 28 Vine Street has moldings at the tops of the corner boards.

The Woburn Street area also includes larger houses built before 1876. Most of these are three bays long, one room wide, two-and-a-half stories high, and are on a brick foundation. The houses at 50 Woburn Street and 85 Woburn Street are smaller versions of this type, while those at 136 Vine Street and 156 Vine Street are larger farmhouses. It should be noted that the 136 Vine Street house was built before 1853, as were several others on this street. And, although the 156 Vine Street house was not built until after 1876, it was owned by a member of the same family as 136 Vine Street, was presumably modeled after that house, and so is included here. The house at 14 Cottage Street is another larger one with a brick foundation and three bays long, but this house is two rooms wide.

Finally, there are some houses indicated on the 1876 map that have fieldstone foundations, suggesting a relatively late date of construction. The house at 63 Woburn Street is a small two-by-two bay one-and-a-third story cottage with a gable end entrance and a doorhood supported by scrolled brackets. Larger two-by-two bay houses are the two-story house at 67 Vine Street with sunburst brackets under the doorhood; the two-and-a-half story house at 75 Woburn Street with brackets under the corner returns and the porch roof; and the two-and-a-half story house at 103 Woburn Street, which has a porch with turned posts.

An anomaly among the early houses is the cottage at 108 Woburn Street. The house was recently for sale and the realtors claimed the date of construction is 1812. It is not on the 1830 map and is difficult to date by stylistic analysis because the foundation is completely covered with cement and the roof framing is hidden by a false ceiling. The exterior suggests, however, that the house may once have been a shed to which a front lean-to was added.

Houses built after 1876. Of the houses built after 1876, one common form is two bays long, one room wide, and two stories high. Examples are at 54 Woburn Street, 56 Woburn Street, and 39 Vine Street, all on brick foundations. Fifty-four and 56 Woburn Street have gable-end entrances; the latter has a porch with turned posts and simple brackets. Thirty-nine Vine Street is set with its side to the street and has a center entrance. The house at 17 Cottage Street is three bays long but otherwise like the rest except that it is on a fieldstone foundation.

Another common type of late nineteenth century house is three bays long, two bays wide, and two-and-a-half stories high. Most, such as the houses at 107 Woburn Street, 110 Woburn Street, and 142 Woburn Street, are set with the side and thus the entrance facing the street; the house at 127 Woburn Street has a gable end entrance, however. These houses have lost most of their original

(see Continuation Sheet)

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Lexington	Form No: F
Property Name: Woburn Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (continuation sheet 3)

exterior finishes, although 110 Woburn Street has turned porch posts and a balustrade and the porch at 127 Woburn Street has Tuscan columns and a balustrade. Although all these houses have very similar profiles, their dates of construction, based on map evidence, range from 1870 to 1910.

The one late nineteenth century double houses inventoried in the Woburn Street area is at 60-62 Woburn Street. It also is three bays long, two rooms wide, two-and-a-half stories high, and with a center entrance. It has scrolled brackets under the front door hood and, on the basis of evidence from historic maps, was built c. 1885.

There are several late nineteenth century farmhouses in the Woburn Street area. Like those built earlier in the century they are three bays long, one room wide, and two-and-a-half stories high. These late nineteenth century farmhouses are located in the upper Woburn Street area -- at 116 Woburn Street and 128 Woburn Street.

Other house types common at the end of the nineteenth century include houses two bays wide, two long, and two-and-a-half stories high. Most are set with the gable end and entrance facing the street, such as the houses at 68 Woburn Street, 124 Woburn Street, 5 Cottage Street, and 30 Cottage Street, although the house at 81 Woburn Street has a side entrance. Map evidence indicates these houses were built c. 1895 to 1900. Most of these houses have lost their original finishes; 124 Woburn Street, however, retains wood shingles and turned porch posts.

There are a few late nineteenth century cottages. They are two bays wide, two deep, one-and-a-half stories high, with an entrance in the gable end. Perhaps not coincidentally, the two examples are located next to each other at 4 and 6 Cottage Street. These houses retain many original features and exterior finishes: porches with turned posts, the spindle (actually square) frieze on the porch at 4 Cottage Street, the two-sided bay window at 6 Cottage Street.

Some of these finishes are repeated in the house at 43 Woburn Street: the porch with turned posts and squared frieze, and the two-sided bay window. This house is three bays long, two wide, two-and-a-half stories high, and set with the gable end toward the street. The house at 51-53 Woburn Street is also the same type, although it has lost its exterior finishes.

Spindled friezes are also found on a larger turn-of-the-century house at 138 Woburn Street. This house is three bays long, two wide, and two-and-a-half stories high. It retains many original finishes: in addition to the friezes on both the front and side entry porches, there are Chippendale railings in both locations, turned posts at the side entry, and the original clapboards and corner boards.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheet 4)

Staple to Inventory form at bottom



INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Lexington	Form No: F
Property Name: Woburn Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (continuation sheet 4)

occupations. Between 1850 and 1855 the number of Irish-born residents doubled and by 1854, 21 of the 48 births in town, or 44%, were children of Irish parentage. Those Irish who could afford to rent or own their own houses soon became concentrated in the Woburn Street area, a section known as "Skunk Hollow" (Worthen 1946:66; Reinhardt 1982:212-213). More research is needed to determine why the Irish settled along Woburn Street; perhaps it was because this was already a working-class neighborhood and was also near the railway line. Whatever the reason, it is clear that by 1876 most of the small cottages and houses in the Woburn Street area were inhabited by Irish and this trend continued after that date. For example, of the 58 residents in the Woburn Street area in the 1887 Directory, 52, or almost 90%, had Irish surnames. Their occupations were also indicative: 35% were laborers, 13% farmers, and 10% railway workers. (Of the remainder, 13% were in other occupations, 17% were housewives, and 12% did not have occupation listed.) By 1899, when Cottage Street had been extended west and more cottages built on this street as well as on Woburn Street, the area was still predominantly Irish, though, as the 1899 Directory makes clear, by that date Irish were living in other sections of Lexington as well. Nonetheless, of the 128 persons listed in the 1899 Directory as living in the Woburn Street area, 112 or 88% had Irish surnames. Their occupations had diversified somewhat, though many remained working class: 23% were laborers, 9% railway workers, 7% farmers, and 4% factory workers.

If names on properties in the atlases accurately reflect ownership, many of the houses in the Woburn Street area were owned by Irish as early as 1875. An 1890 account of the Lexington Savings Bank established in 1871, albeit self congratulatory, may indicate one of the reasons ownership was possible.

The investments are chiefly in mortgages and real estate . . . . Many of the depositors are laboring men and girls at service in families. As a means of encouraging habits of industry and forethought, the savings bank has had a most salutary influence. In this way it has done much in helping laborers to buy land and make pleasant homes for themselves. A large proportion of the workingmen of the town possess such homes and are sober, prosperous and respectable people. (Hurd 1890, I:632)

A number of the houses remained rental properties into the twentieth century.

It was during the period at the end of the nineteenth century, when the Woburn Street area was an Irish working-class neighborhood, that it became the place to which many houses were moved from other parts of Lexington. Again more research is needed to determine why the Woburn Street area was chosen; one can speculate that, in cases such as the old high school which was moved from Massachusetts Avenue near the Woburn Street intersection, the Woburn Street area was chosen because of its proximity (see 10-12-14 and 16-18-20 Vine Street forms). However, in other instances, such as the house at 78 Woburn Street, which was moved from the site of present-day Decelle's on Massachusetts Avenue, or the house now at 9 Utica Street, which was moved from next to St. Brigid's

(see Continuation Sheet)

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Lexington	Form No: F
Property Name: Woburn Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (continuation sheet 5)

Church, houses were moved a considerable distance. Perhaps the Woburn Street area was chosen because it was a modest neighborhood and there was a demand for boardinghouses and tenements, to which many of these moved houses were converted. Today, if observations made during this survey are correct, Woburn Street remains an area with many more rental apartments and houses than is the case in most other parts of Lexington.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

1852 map  
1876 map  
1889 map  
1898 map  
1906 map  
1887 Directory  
1899 Directory

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

